



Martha Jungwirth

*All Will Fall*

31 May—30 July 2022

London Ely House

Thaddaeus Ropac

London Paris Salzburg Seoul

# Martha Jungwirth

## *All Will Fall*

31 May—30 July 2022

London Ely House

A new series of oil paintings by Austrian artist Martha Jungwirth will be exhibited in her most extensive presentation in the UK to date. Poised between abstraction and figuration, her paintings are inspired by what she calls conceptual ‘pretexts’ – impressions from her travels, Greek mythology, the appearances of friends and companions, as well as contemporary political events – capturing fleeting, internal impulses that are recorded in watercolour and paint. Grounded in closely observed perceptions of her environment, this new body of work draws on elements of the natural world depicted in the form of flowers, popular culture expressed through a portrait of Lady Gaga and static objects such as a colouring book. Taking its name from the publication *All Will Fall*, which Jungwirth has in her studio, the exhibition references Francisco Goya’s aquatint etching from *Los Caprichos* (1797–99) illustrating the fate of all those deluded by love and the works on view are reminiscent of the Spanish artist’s oeuvre.

The series *Hexenflug* (2022) is inspired by Goya’s *Vuelo de Brujas* (Witches’ Flight; c. 1798) from his group of six paintings related to witchcraft. In Jungwirth’s work, subtle dabs of lime green at the top and in the middle anchor the predominantly red and pink strokes, recalling her earlier works with more figurative allusions. The reference to witchcraft, which was seen as an evil and unnatural element, alludes to the role played by women in power and the threat this has represented for men over the centuries. Conjuring a sense of the body with colours suggestive of flesh and blood, a similar theme reappears in *Lady Gaga* (2022), where the American pop star becomes symbolic of contemporary female power in showbusiness.

Jungwirth’s figures often appear on small sections of her brown paper, surrounded by areas of untouched cardboard or collaged paper whose absorbent surfaces preserve her decisive marks which, once made, cannot be altered. By connecting her practice with oil paint, which she describes as ‘more massive, and dense’, with the ‘unified, liquid, transparent’ qualities of watercolour, her images are propelled beyond the easily identifiable. The layered clusters, forms and marks can be transparent, opaque, or somewhere in between, with some appearing deliberate while others seem accidental.

Over the past six decades, Jungwirth has forged a singular approach to painting. Mingling mythical or universal subject matter, her compositions reveal themselves to her during the painting process. The artist creates in concert with her materials to produce works that are poised between chance and calculation. At times more predominant in the pictorial space – as in the series *Nicht mehr und nicht weniger* (2022) – the ‘constellations of blotches’ never overwhelm her chosen surfaces. Referencing Goya’s *Ni mas ni menos* (Neither more nor less;

**Thaddaeus Ropac**

London Paris Salzburg Seoul

1796–97), in which he caricatures the portraitist as a monkey and the sitter as a donkey, Jungwirth's dynamic composition seems to exteriorise the idea of missing visual links between imagination and reality. This blending of the two realms emerges from her fluid painterly process, which constantly explores the transition from a material to a transcendent world.

In contrast to the rational principles of Minimalism and Conceptualism that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, Jungwirth's paintings are grounded in the body and convey a palpable sense of self. Art historian Jörg Heiser has described her work as 'liberated capturing', comparing her to the American abstract painter Joan Mitchell. 'My art is like a diary, seismographic,' describes Jungwirth. 'That is the method of my work. I am completely related to myself. Drawing and painting are a movement that runs through me.' Filled with her vibrant brushstrokes, smudges, smears and lines, this body of work inhabits her ever-morphing zone of pure invention. With finger marks, scratches and even shoeprints remaining as a visceral record of her presence in the work, the physical intensity of Jungwirth's tactile surfaces and eruptions of colour are balanced by her delicate sensitivity and restraint.

*My pictorial reality is charged with passion, a language tied to the body, to dynamic movement. Painting is a matter of form, and then it receives a soul – through me.*

— Martha Jungwirth

## About the artist

Martha Jungwirth was born in 1940 in Vienna, where she continues to live and work. In 1961, while still a student at the Academy of Applied Arts (1956–63), she was awarded the Msgr. Otto Mauer Prize, followed by the Theodor Körner Prize (1964) and the Joan Miró Prize (1966). Having studied under Professor Carl Unger, she later taught at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna for a decade from 1967–77. In 1968 she was the only woman among the founding members of the loose group of artists 'Wirklichkeiten' ['Realities'] alongside Wolfgang Herzig, Kurt Kocherscheidt, Peter Pongratz, Franz Ringel and Robert Zeppel-Sperl, whose work was shown in the exhibition at the Secession, Vienna in 1968, curated by Otto Breicha. The group exhibited together from 1968–72. In 1977, Jungwirth was included in documenta 6 in Kassel. More recently, an entire room was dedicated to her work in the exhibition curated by Albert Oehlen for the Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg in 2010. A career retrospective spanning five decades was shown at the Kunsthalle Krems in 2014, followed by an exhibition focusing on her watercolours at the Kunstmuseum Ravensburg in 2018. That same year, she received the prestigious Oskar Kokoschka Prize awarded by the Austrian state, accompanied by an extensive solo exhibition at the Albertina in Vienna. A retrospective at the Museum Liaunig in Neuhaus marked the occasion of the artist's 80th birthday in 2020. The following year, Jungwirth was awarded the Grand Austrian State Prize, the Republic's highest commendation for an outstanding life's work in the field of art. In 2022, the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf will present an extensive solo exhibition of her oeuvre. Her work is revered by different generations of artists and now exhibited and housed in the collections of significant institutions such as Albertina Museum, Vienna and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

**Thaddaeus Ropac**

London Paris Salzburg Seoul